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General Assembly

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Committee on Information
Nineteenth session

Draft report

I. Introduction

1. At its thirty-fourth session, the General Assembly decided to maintain the Committee to Review United Nations Public Information Policies and Activities, established under Assembly resolution 33/115 C of 18 December 1978, which would be known as the Committee on Information, and to increase its membership from 41 to 66. In its resolution 34/182 of 18 December 1979, the Assembly requested the Committee on Information:

> "(a) To continue to examine United Nations public information policies and activities, in the light of the evolution of international relations, particularly during the past two decades, and of the imperatives of the establishment of the new international economic order and of a new world information and communication order;
>
> "(b) To evaluate and follow up the efforts made and the progress achieved by the United Nations system in the field of information and communications;
>
> "(c) To promote the establishment of a new, more just and more effective world information and communication order intended to strengthen peace and international understanding and based on the free circulation and wider and better balanced dissemination of information and to make recommendations thereon to the General Assembly;"

and requested the Committee and the Secretary-General to report to the Assembly at its thirty-fifth session.

2. At its thirty-fifth session, the General Assembly, in resolution 35/201 of 16 December 1980, expressed its satisfaction with the work of the Committee, approved its report and the recommendations of its Ad Hoc Working Group,[1] reaffirmed the mandate given to the Committee in Assembly resolution 34/182, and decided to increase the membership of the Committee from 66 to 67. At its organizational session in 1980, the Committee agreed that the principle of geographical rotation would be applied to all the officers of the Committee and that they should be elected for two-year terms of office.

3. At its thirty-sixth to fiftieth sessions, the General Assembly again expressed its satisfaction with the work of the Committee, approved its reports[2] and recommendations, and reaffirmed the mandate given to the Committee in resolutions 34/182, 36/149 B, 37/94 B, 38/82 B, 39/98 A, 40/164 A, 41/68 A, 42/162, 43/60, 44/50, 45/76, 46/73 B, 47/73 B, 48/44 B, 49/38 B and 50/31 B. At its fifty-first session, the Assembly took note of the report of the Committee[3] and adopted its consensus recommendations (51/138 A and B of 13 December 1996). The Assembly also requested the Committee to report to it at its fifty-second session.

4. At its thirty-ninth session, the General Assembly appointed two new members of the Committee, namely China and Mexico; at its forty-first session the Assembly appointed Malta a member of the Committee; at its forty-third session, it appointed Hungary, Ireland and Zimbabwe; and at its forty-fourth session, it appointed Nepal.

5. At its forty-fifth session, the General Assembly decided, on the recommendation of the Committee, to

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increase the membership of the Committee from 74 to 78 members, and appointed Czechoslovakia, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Jamaica and Uruguay members of the Committee. The Assembly also decided to appoint the Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic as a member of the Committee, with immediate effect, to fill the vacancy left by the German Democratic Republic.

6. At its forty-sixth session, the General Assembly decided, on the recommendation of the Committee, to increase the membership of the Committee from 78 to 79 members, and appointed Burkina Faso a member of the Committee.

7. At its forty-seventh session, the General Assembly decided, on the recommendation of the Committee, to increase the membership of the Committee from 79 to 81 members, and appointed the Republic of Korea and Senegal members of the Committee.

8. At its forty-eighth session, the General Assembly decided, on the recommendation of the Committee, to increase the membership of the Committee from 81 to 83 members, and appointed Gabon and Israel members of the Committee.

9. At its forty-ninth session, the General Assembly decided, on the recommendation of the Committee, to increase the membership of the Committee from 83 to 88 members and appointed Belize, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Kazakhstan and South Africa members of the Committee.

10. At its fiftieth session, the General Assembly decided, on the recommendation of the Committee, to increase the membership of the Committee from 88 to 89 members, and appointed the Democratic People's Republic of Korea a member of the Committee.

11. The Committee is composed of the following Member States:

Algeria
Argentina
Bangladesh
Belarus
Belgium
Belize
Benin
Brazil
Bulgaria
Burkina Faso
Burundi
Chile
China
Colombia
Congo
Costa Rica
Côte d'Ivoire
Croatia
Cuba
Cyprus
Czech Republic
Democratic People's Republic of Korea
Democratic Republic of the Congo
Denmark
Ecuador
Egypt
El Salvador
Ethiopia
Finland
France
Gabon
Germany
Ghana
Greece
Guatemala
Guinea
Guyana
Hungary
India
Indonesia
Iran (Islamic Republic of)
Ireland
Israel
Italy
Jamaica
Japan
Jordan
Kazakhstan
Kenya
Lebanon
Malta
Mexico
Mongolia
Morocco
Nepal
Netherlands
Niger
Nigeria
Pakistan
Peru
Philippines
Poland
Portugal
Republic of Korea
Romania
Russian Federation
Senegal
Singapore
Slovakia
Somalia
South Africa
Spain
Sri Lanka
Sudan
Syrian Arab Republic
Togo
Trinidad and Tobago
Tunisia
Turkey
Ukraine
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland
United Republic of Tanzania
United States of America
Uruguay
Venezuela
Viet Nam
Yemen
Yugoslavia
Zimbabwe

II. Organizational questions

A. Opening of the session

12. The organizational meeting of the nineteenth session of the Committee was held at United Nations Headquarters on 13 May 1997. The session was opened by the outgoing Chairman of the Committee, Mr. Ivan Maximov (Bulgaria).

13. At the same meeting, the Bureau of the Committee was elected, except for the third Vice-Chairman, who was elected by acclamation on 14 May (see para. 15). The new Chairman and the Assistant Secretary-General for Public Information made statements (see annexes I and II). Mr. Mark Malloch Brown, Chairman of the Task Force on the Reorientation of United Nations Public Information Activities established by the Secretary-General, informally briefed the session on the objectives of the Task Force. He said that the members of the Task Force would closely monitor proceedings in the Committee during its session to gain guidance.

14. On the basis of a proposal by the Bureau of the Committee, the representatives of the regional groups and the Group of 77 and China that an opportunity be provided to the Committee to consider the recommendations by the Secretary-General for the reorientation of United Nations public information activities and, in that context, the report of the Task Force, the Committee decided by consensus, after a debate in which 14 Member States spoke, to hold the session in two segments. The first would be held from 13 to 19 May 1997 and the second in early September 1997. It was further decided that Member States would have the opportunity to make statements during the second segment.

B. Election of officers

15. In accordance with the principle of geographical rotation, the Committee elected the following officers to serve for the period 1997-1998:

Chairman:

Mr. José Alberto de Sousa (Portugal)

Vice-Chairmen:

Mr. Holger Martinsen (Argentina)
Ms. Maria Laose (Nigeria)
Mr. Salman Abbasy (Pakistan)

Rapporteur:

Mr. Alyaksei Skrypko (Belarus)

C. Adoption of the agenda and programme of work

16. At its organizational meeting, the Committee adopted, without objection, the following agenda and programme of work (A/AC.198/1997/1):

1. Opening of the session.
2. Election of officers.
3. Adoption of the agenda and programme of work.
4. Statement by the Chairman.
5. Statement by the Assistant Secretary-General.
6. General debate and consideration of substantive questions:
   (a) Promotion of the establishment of a new, more just and more effective world information and communication order intended to strengthen peace and international understanding and based on the free circulation and wider and better balanced dissemination of information;
   (b) Continuation of the examination of United Nations public information policies and activities, in the light of the evolution of international relations, and of the need to establish the new international economic order and the new world information and communication order;
   (c) Evaluation and follow-up of the efforts made and the progress achieved by the United Nations system in the field of information and communications.
7. Preparation and adoption of the report of the Committee to the General Assembly at its fifty-second session.

17. The Committee held the substantive meetings of its nineteenth session at United Nations Headquarters from 13 to 19 May 1997. It resumed for one meeting on 3 September 1997.

18. For consideration of agenda item 6, the Committee had before it the reports of the Secretary-General on: (a) evaluation of the Dag Hammarskjöld Library (A/AC.198/1997/2 and Add.1); (b) review of publications by the Department of Public Information (A/AC.198/1997/3); (c) review of publications produced by the Department of Public Information in the sphere of development (A/AC.198/1997/4); (d) integration of United

Nations information centres with field offices of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) (A/AC.198/1997/5); (e) evaluation of the United Nations information centres (A/AC.198/1997/6); (f) activities of the Joint United Nations Information Committee in 1996 (A/AC.198/1997/7); and (g) observations and suggestions by Member States and international organizations on ways and means of furthering the development of communications infrastructures and capabilities in developing countries (A/AC.198/1997/8). Also before the Committee were three informal conference room papers: Department of Public Information — Core functions; questionnaire to Directors of United Nations information centres; and questionnaire to partners of United Nations information centres.

19. For its resumed session held on 3 September 1997, the Committee also had before it a conference room paper containing a note to the Committee, in which the Secretary-General conveyed his proposals regarding measures in the context of reorientation of United Nations public information activities; as well as a conference room paper containing the report of the Task Force on the Reorientation of United Nations Public Information Activities, entitled "Global vision, local voice: a strategic communications programme for the United Nations".

D. Observers

20. The following Member States took part in the session as observers: Armenia, Australia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Bahamas, Canada, Eritrea, Lesotho, Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, Kyrgyzstan, Luxembourg, Suriname, Sweden, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Turkmenistan, United Arab Emirates, Uzbekistan and the Holy See.

21. Representatives of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, the International Monetary Fund, the World Health Organization and the Organization of African Unity also attended.

E. Other matters

22. The Chairman informed the Committee that the Republic of Georgia had requested membership in the Committee.

III. General debate and consideration of substantive questions

A. First part of the nineteenth session (13-19 May 1997)

23. Statements during the general debate were made by the following States members of the Committee: Algeria, Argentina, Bangladesh, Belarus, Brazil, Bulgaria, China, Cuba, Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Ecuador, Egypt, Ghana, Guyana, Indonesia, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Ireland (on behalf of the Western European and Other States Group), Israel, Jamaica (on behalf of the States members of the Caribbean Community), Mexico, Morocco, Nigeria, Philippines, Republic of Korea, Russian Federation, Sudan, Syrian Arab Republic, Netherlands (on behalf of the European Union), Tunisia, Ukraine, United Republic of Tanzania (on behalf of the Group of 77), Uruguay, United States of America and Zimbabwe. Statements were also made by the observers of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and the United Arab Emirates. A message from the Assistant Director-General for Communication, Information and Informatics of UNESCO was read out.

24. In taking up the substantive questions before the Committee, all speakers expressed the sincere dedication of their Governments to freedom of the press and freedom of information, which were fundamental freedoms indispensable to democracy and development. They condemned attacks on journalists wherever they occurred and paid solemn tribute to those who had been killed in the pursuit of their profession. Many delegations recalled the important commemoration of World Press Freedom Day on 2 May 1997, with one speaker characterizing the programme arranged by the Department of Public Information as "superb". Several others strongly supported the regional press seminars organized by the Department in cooperation with UNESCO and noted the positive role they played in the promotion of independent and pluralistic media. They appreciated the Department's support for a similar seminar being planned for the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, to be held at Sofia in September 1997.

25. A number of speakers pointed to the continuing importance of a new world information and communication order, based on a free and balanced flow of information, in a world where disparities in technological advances were widespread and the gap between the developed and developing countries was ever-widening. It was critical in their view that the gains of the information revolution were made accessible to the developing countries. They said that

the mass media must impartially serve the cause of democracy, development and peace. Several speakers said that the information should not undermine values, distort facts and demonstrate a bias towards countries with different systems and values.

26. In addressing the public information policies and activities of the United Nations, all speakers supported the view that communications programmes, promotion of United Nations objectives and dissemination of information to project a positive image of the United Nations in all its aspects were the priorities of the Department of Public Information. One delegation, speaking on behalf of a group, said that there must be a commitment to the urgent task of strengthening the role of information in the United Nations system. Enhancing United Nations capabilities to deal with the challenges of the twenty-first century in the field of information was a top priority, in the words of another speaker.

27. Many delegations voiced an understanding of the need for reform of the United Nations, which would include reform of the Department of Public Information. One delegation, speaking on behalf of a large group in supporting the Secretary-General's reform efforts, pointed to the importance of the Department's advocacy tasks aimed at winning people over to the side of the United Nations. In the words of another delegation, it was important that the good news about the United Nations be told. All agreed that resources commensurate with the message must be made available.

28. All delegations took note of the fact that the Task Force on the Reorientation of the United Nations Public Information Activities would be submitting recommendations in July 1997. One delegation, speaking on behalf of a large group, as well as a number of other speakers, were emphatically of the opinion that the views of the Member States should be sought on any proposed reform of the Department of Public Information. They believed, therefore, that there should be close cooperation and involvement of the membership of the Committee on Information with the Task Force for the sake of transparency in the reform process. As one speaker put it, the acquiescence and support of Member States was a sine qua non for the success of the ongoing reform of the United Nations. A number of speakers questioned whether the composition of the Task Force would allow it to consider adequately the diverse interests of all Member States and produce objective recommendations. One delegation suggested that media experts from developing countries be added to the Task Force. Some also felt that the Committee on Information should be represented on the Task Force by its Bureau or its Chairman.

29. One speaker said that reform should not be an end in itself or reflect the views of only one country or a group of countries and that the Committee should approve any new proposals on the structure of the Department of Public Information before they were implemented. Another recalled that the reform of the Department undertaken some 10 years earlier had been a failure, and hoped such an outcome would not be repeated. Several delegations said that it was important for the Task Force to work in close contact with senior officials of the Department in formulating its recommendations. In one delegation's view, the head of the Department should be consulted on any reform of the Department, and a number of delegations felt that there should be no shrinkage or elimination of programmes in a Department that enjoyed a vast consensus within the Organization.

30. One delegation, speaking on behalf of a large group, said that before the name of the Department of Public Information was changed, Member States should be involved and informed of the reasoning behind the proposal and how it would affect existing programmes and activities. Another speaker held the strong view that a name change or any other measures regarding the Department should be approved by the General Assembly. Several other delegations agreed that the Department's role should not be restricted merely to liaison between the Organization and the media. One speaker was of the view that the Department must use its mandate to play a primary, rather than subsidiary, role in generating support for development worldwide. In that connection, one delegation observed that the public information programme was as substantive as economic, humanitarian or any other programme, and that the Department was definitely not an administrative or support service. Several other speakers supported that point of view.

31. A number of speakers agreed that any change in the Department's structure must take into account General Assembly mandates; to do otherwise would, in the words of one speaker, "fly in the face" of the Assembly's instructions. Another speaker noted that many of the Department's functions had been mandated by the Assembly and that any changes that might affect those mandates required the input of the largest number of Member States. He expressed full confidence that the Secretary-General would ensure that the Task Force consulted with Member States. One speaker called for more transparency in the area of unfunded mandates, which were an enormous expense for the Department. Another delegation said that it would not welcome cuts in the use of the Russian language in the

context of reform, while several others also stressed the importance of multilingualism and the dissemination of information in Arabic. Several delegations underscored that the objective of reform should not be limited merely to cost-cutting, but to enhanced efficiency and to producing more with less.

32. In that connection, many delegations praised the Department of Public Information for successfully managing to meet the increasing demands for information and for the effective and professional service it was providing in the current financial crisis. They reiterated their support for the dynamic and pragmatically oriented management of the Department and for its innovative approach to its information tasks and expressed appreciation to the entire staff for their dedicated work. In the words of one speaker, management and staff of the Department were deserving of great praise for their untiring efforts in strengthening the image of the United Nations and for high professional standards that they had at all times maintained in the execution of their duties. He suggested a careful examination of the structures and new methods of work devised by the Department in the last few years before new recommendations for its reform were developed or introduced. Another said that the Department had already begun its renovation, thereby creating a reliable basis for future reform.

33. A number of speakers underscored the importance of the Department's dissemination of information to developing countries. They also believed that in the present information age the Department must be strengthened; the reform process should, therefore, enhance, rather than weaken, the Department's functions. Another delegation, speaking on behalf of a large group, said that the Department should advise other departments and missions on how to integrate an information policy for outreach into their substantive work. One delegation, also speaking on behalf of a large group, advanced some specific suggestions to the Task Force, among which was that the free flow of accurate and up-to-date information, taking into account the linguistic diversity of the Organization, must remain the primary function of the Department and that the dissemination of relevant information about the United Nations and its programmes should continue to be a core activity of the Department, particularly in developing countries. He also hoped the Task Force would take "good note" of all the suggestions expressed at the current session of the Committee and was heartened by its commitment to continue the process of consultation with Member States so that the views of every delegation could be heard. He also said that reforms should be aimed primarily at creating a more effective, productive and resourceful Department of Public Information, rather than simply downsizing it or chopping off useful activities or programmes just for the sake of effecting economies. One speaker said that Member States should not expect the Department to persuade them of the usefulness of the Organization — that was a job for Permanent Representatives. He expected the Task Force to produce proposals further strengthening the Department's capacity to serve the needs of countries and peoples. In that context he was reassured by the participation of the Permanent Representative of Chile to the United Nations in the Task Force.

34. A number of delegations underscored the importance of continuing coordination by the Department of certain mandated activities pertaining to the mission and function of the United Nations in regard to peace and security and economic and social development, including, for example, special programmes on Palestine, decolonization, preservation of the environment and other development activities. Expressing appreciation for the Department's excellent programme to commemorate the tenth anniversary of the Chernobyl disaster, a number of delegations stressed the importance of further dissemination of information on the after-effects of that catastrophe. Another delegation said that the Department deserved recognition for its important role in the successful battle against apartheid in South Africa. One speaker congratulated the Department on its cooperation with Columbia University on the recent Roundtable on Communication for the Promotion of Peace, Development, Democracy and Respect for Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms in the Global Village.

35. Many delegations, including one who spoke on behalf of a number of others, stressed the critical importance of the information component in United Nations peacekeeping missions and strongly supported the involvement of the Department at the earliest planning stages of these missions. One speaker believed that peacekeeping was a key area for effective dissemination of information and supported the Secretary-General's call in that connection for "preventive journalism". Several delegations welcomed the interdepartmental consultative mechanism that met regularly to discuss the information components of peacekeeping operations. One speaker on behalf of a group specifically expressed appreciation for the seminar on public information policies and practices for field missions, organized in March 1997 by the Department of Public Information and the Department of Peacekeeping Operations.

36. Many speakers expressed support for the preservation and strengthening of the United Nations information centres and regretted any resource reductions to the detriment of

their important programmes. One speaker on behalf of a group said that the United Nations must have "a voice and a face" in countries and regions around the world and to this end believed that the United Nations information centres were a key part of United Nations outreach. Another delegation characterized information centres as catalysts and pillars in the information strategy to stimulate public interest in the United Nations and sensitize the world's peoples to international issues. He felt that the directors of United Nations information centres were doing good jobs in the face of shrinking resources. Another said that the functions of the United Nations information centres were far broader than their serving as mere depositories for documents. A number of speakers underscored the special value of centres as sources of information for developing countries in particular. In stressing this point, one delegation said that in those countries the United Nations information centres were the only point of contact with valuable sources of materials from the United Nations. He also said that in developing countries particular emphasis should be placed on integrating technological innovations into the working of United Nations information centres to make them models of high-technology information for the resource-starved people.

37. Another speaker said that his delegation attached great significance to the activities of the United Nations information centres and information components in countries with economies in transition. He underlined the increased effectiveness and valuable activities of the information component of the United Nations office in Minsk, which had resulted in the "soaring of public interest" in the United Nations. One delegation expressed appreciation for the work of the United Nations Information Centre in Moscow, but regretted its staffing situation, specifically the level of the Director's post, which should be raised. Speakers expressed satisfaction with the efficient work of United Nations information centres in Jakarta, Mexico City and Khartoum. In referring to the latter centre, one speaker noted that United Nations information centres should report on the positive developments in the areas they served.

38. On the subject of integration of United Nations information centres with UNDP field offices, many delegations said that any integration should be considered on a case-by-case basis, taking into consideration the views of the host countries. One delegation, calling United Nations information centres the Organization's "windows to the world", highlighted a number of problems, both administrative and substantive in nature, posed by integration. He therefore believed that there should be careful consideration of the process by Member States, who were the end users, and not by non-governmental actors and added that the Department could not be reformed by outsiders. One speaker raised the issue of the loss of efficiency and effectiveness of the United Nations information centres in some countries, including his own, following their integration with field offices of UNDP and called for the restoration of the independent status of the United Nations information centre in Dhaka. Another delegation said that, concerning the operational structures of the Department of Public Information, particularly United Nations information centres and the Dag Hammarskjöld Library, his delegation had serious reservations on the suggestions regarding the privatization of those structures or delegation of their management to bodies other than the United Nations because that would compromise their independence, credibility and objectivity.

39. One delegation, speaking on behalf of a group, said that integration was a useful mechanism in certain instances, but pointed out that where United Nations information centres could best carry forward their mandate separately, they should be able to maintain their distinct status. He further commended the United Nations information centre in Port-of-Spain for playing an important role in a region comprised of widely dispersed countries and reiterated an earlier recommendation that the UNDP office in Jamaica be provided with the capacity to complement the activities of the information centre. He also supported the idea that United Nations information centres should be enabled to serve as public information service providers to United Nations bodies in their respective locations and that the centre spokesperson should be brought into the substantive preparation and handling of issues. One speaker said that integrated information centres should continue to be strengthened and the directors of those centres given more access to in-depth background materials on a range of issues. One delegation commended closer cooperation between the Department of Public Information and UNDP through the high-level mechanism already in place and stressed the importance of the full implementation of the public information mandate, as well as the need for the Department to be consulted in the selection and the performance evaluation of resident representatives/resident coordinators serving also as centre directors.

40. One delegation suggested that a fresh look at United Nations information centres was needed. To that end, he said that perhaps the Task Force should study five or six specific centres to see what worked and what did not. Another delegation, speaking on behalf of a large group, suggested that the Task Force consider that the role of United Nations information centres should be more focused on the issues relevant to individual countries, that they should have

sufficient resources to carry out their main tasks, and that they should be integrated where appropriate and beneficial.

41. On the subject of utilizing new technologies in getting out the message of the United Nations, many speakers expressed their appreciation for efforts by the Department in disseminating materials electronically to expand the United Nations outreach and save money. One speaker observed that there was a new momentum within the Department of Public Information to raise information activities to the most modern level. Another commended the Department's use of modern communication technologies, singling out its good work on enriching the United Nations "home page" on the Internet, as well as use of modern technologies by the Dag Hammarskjöld Library. One speaker noted with great satisfaction that the United Nations home page was now being presented on the Internet in French and Spanish, in addition to English. At the same time, many speakers, however, stressed the importance of continued dissemination of information in the traditional media to meet the needs of those countries that were less technologically advanced than others. In that connection, one delegation supported the view expressed by the Administrative Committee on Coordination on universal access to basic communication and information services that the United Nations should assist in making the gains of the information revolution accessible to developing countries.

42. A number of delegations commented on the value of publications produced by the Department of Public Information in transmitting the message of the United Nations. Several expressed their strong support for the Department's development publications, including *Development Business*, *Development Update*, *UN Chronicle*, *Africa Recovery* and *UN Briefing Papers*, which they believed could help foster development concerns. One delegation in particular appreciated that *Development Business* had the capacity to generate commercial opportunities, while another delegation supported making that publication available on the Internet. One speaker suggested the possibility of the Department creating a new daily or weekly publication that would include the most important information about the work of the United Nations system. One delegation pointed to the Department's successes, such as the Blue Books series and the *UN Chronicle*, which had been improved.

43. On the subject of the Dag Hammarskjöld Library, one delegation was particularly impressed by the reform already under way in the Library and considered the survey by the consultants to be very good. Another speaker welcomed the recommendations in the survey and was pleased that they were endorsed by the Secretary-General. He, therefore, hoped that the Task Force would make use of the evaluation to enhance further the Library's functions. One delegation, speaking on behalf of a large group, observed that the evaluation contained many useful proposals and that it should be implemented at an early date. Several delegations appreciated the Library's training programmes, which had greatly benefited them, and thanked the staff for the continuing reference services they provided. One delegation expressed the hope that the Library would be allocated resources commensurate with its work.

44. A number of delegations were highly appreciative of the services that the Department of Public Information provided to correspondents. One delegation, speaking on behalf of a group, said that the daily highlights and press releases were particularly valuable to small delegations and should be maintained. Several mentioned the importance of outreach to small and medium-sized media organizations, especially in the developing world. In that connection one delegation praised the Department for establishing links with diverse media around the world. One delegation pointed to the Department's programmes for training media professionals in developing countries, including Palestinian journalists, and hoped that the Department would continue to play a pioneering role in this area. Another expressed appreciation to the Department for organizing the World Television Forum.

45. One delegation, speaking on behalf of a group, suggested that the Task Force consider improved access for the press to reliable sources of information within the Secretariat. He also said that the Office of the Spokesman of the Secretary-General should offer a forceful expression of the Secretary-General's position and should anticipate and package stories in a format suitable for media consumption. He said further that it would remain the task of the Department of Public Information as a whole to supply other forms of straightforward factual material to the news media. Another delegation, speaking on behalf of a group, commended the Department for its efforts to reflect linguistic diversity in the information it produced and in that context appreciated its press releases in both working languages and encouraged their dissemination over the Internet.

46. Several delegations also expressed satisfaction at the multilingualism in the Department's radio output and pointed in particular to the Spanish and Portuguese programming. One speaker said that his delegation had been working actively with the Department on the development of the Portuguese programme for United Nations Radio, which was a success and should be further enhanced. Another delegation, speaking on behalf of a large group,

stressed that radio remained the most important and versatile information medium in the Caribbean and called for the strengthening of the Department's Caribbean Radio Unit. Several speakers emphasized the central role that radio played in developing countries as the most accessible medium to their peoples, and in this connection they pointed to the need to strengthen the Department's radio services. Another delegation noted innovations introduced by the Department, such as the worldwide live radio discussion on global issues held between the Secretary-General and journalists from radio networks on five continents. In the view of one delegation, the Department should be provided with the necessary financial resources for its radio production.

47. One delegation protested the violation of its national sovereignty by the radio and television transmissions that another country was directing specifically against it for subversive goals. His country would continue to adopt the necessary measures to protect its sovereignty and dignity, he said.

48. One delegation, speaking on behalf of a group, praised the Department's guided tour operation and expressed the hope that tours would be allowed access to as much of the Headquarters building as possible. In his view, that should include access to the General Assembly and Security Council chambers, even when formal meetings were in session.

49. Several delegations pointed to the positive contributions of the Joint United Nations Information Committee in developing a joint message of the United Nations. Another suggested that the role of that Committee might be strengthened in the process of reform so that it could serve as a forum for the coordination of an information strategy within the United Nations system.

50. Following the debate, the Committee continued deliberation on its upcoming programme of work.

51. One delegation, speaking on behalf of a large group, reported that her group had met to discuss various aspects of the work of the Committee. She said that while it was not her intention to question the credibility of the group composed of the Bureau of the Committee, representatives of the regional groups, the Group of 77 and China, her group believed that decisions on substantive issues should be taken in the Committee, rather than in the "extended" Bureau. Therefore, an informal working group could be convened to make conclusive and mutually satisfactory recommendations on the reform of the Department, as well as on the draft resolutions to be adopted by the Committee. She further said that the composition of the Bureau should be limited to the elected Bureau, although in her group's view the Chairman could invite other Committee members to participate on an equitable geographic basis. A number of other delegations supported that general position.

52. One speaker specified that in the view of his delegation, it was the working methods of the Committee on Information, rather than the reform work of the Task Force, that was under consideration. He emphasized, and another delegation agreed, that the two issues should not be linked. Several delegations did not believe that the work of the group composed of the Bureau of the Committee, representatives of regional groups, the Group of 77 and China had been successful. One speaker stressed the importance of the Committee's activities and stated that further deliberations should be held before the session resumed in September.

53. Another delegation, speaking on behalf of a large group, said that in their view the work of the Bureau of the Committee, the representatives of regional groups, the Group of 77 and China, had been conducted in an open and transparent manner, with the representation of all regional groups. He said that the function of that group was, first and foremost, to meet for consultations and for information purposes, and that no decisions of a substantive nature were taken at its meetings. In his view, the extended Bureau had operated well for a number of years and had done a good job. He stressed the importance of maintaining the consensus that had prevailed in the Committee. The same speaker said that he realized that the process of reform had given rise to fears and suspicion. However, in the view of the delegations he represented, the members of the Committee had had an opportunity to present their views in the general debate, and now the Task Force must be allowed to do its work. He said that the members of the Task Force had made clear that they were open to suggestions and there had been no shortage of consultations. In the view of his delegation, the appropriate time to consider the work of the Task Force was during the resumed nineteenth session of the Committee, scheduled for September, when any recommendations could be seen in the context of the overall reform process; he therefore asked that all decisions on substantive issues be deferred until that time.

54. A number of delegations spoke in support of that point of view. One speaker stated that in the view of his delegation, the resolutions adopted by the Committee at previous sessions had always reflected the wishes and recommendations of all members, and accordingly he wondered where, if at all, the Bureau had gone wrong in its work. He thought that creating other mechanisms for the

workings of the Committee would create a bureaucratic nightmare.

55. Representatives of several groups said that they required additional details on the proposal that had been put forward, as well as more time for consultations before a decision could be taken on it.

56. In view of the discussion that had taken place, the Chairman of the Committee decided to continue bilateral consultations with the representatives of the regional groups and with the Bureau. The purpose would be to arrive at a consensus recommendation regarding the proposals, as well as an agreed date to convene a resumed meeting prior to September.

B. Resumed session (3 September 1997)

57. In accordance with the agreement reached at the first part of the session, the Committee on Information opened its resumed nineteenth session on 3 September. The Committee had before it a conference room paper containing a note to the Committee in which the Secretary-General had conveyed his proposals regarding measures in the context of the reorientation of United Nations activities, as well as a conference room paper containing the report of the Task Force.

58. The Assistant Secretary-General for Public Information gave an overview of the contents of the note to the Committee and indicated that the Secretary-General was in concurrence with the conceptual approach and thrust of the main recommendations of the Task Force. He added that in the view of the Secretary-General, public information and communications were an integral part of the substantive programme of the United Nations, and not merely a support function.

59. The Chairman of the Task Force, addressed the resumed session on behalf of his colleagues on the Task Force and highlighted the principal recommendations contained in its report. He stressed the need for Member States to ensure that the mandates in the field of communications and public information should be commensurate with the resources available to the department concerned. He added that the intent of the Task Force was not to instruct the Department on how to do its work, rather it was to give it authority, direction and purpose.

60. The Chairman of the Committee subsequently informed the Committee that on the basis of his consultations with the regional and other groups, he had been led to believe that Member States felt that they needed more time to study the documentation before the Committee and therefore wished to suspend the session to allow time for consultations. He assured the Committee that he would come back to the Committee with the results of his consultations prior to consideration of agenda item 89 by the Special Political and Decolonization Committee (the Fourth Committee). The Committee decided on that basis to suspend the session.

IV. Preparation and adoption of the report of the Committee to the General Assembly at its fifty-second session

61. At its 6th meeting, held on 19 May 1997, the Committee decided, by consensus, to recommend to the General Assembly the adoption of the following draft decision:

Increase in the membership of the Committee on Information

The General Assembly decides to increase the membership of the Committee on Information from 89 to 90 members and decides to appoint the Republic of Georgia a member of the Committee on Information.

Notes

[1] *Official Records of the General Assembly, Thirty-fifth Session, Supplement No. 21* (A/35/21), annex, sect. V.

[2] Ibid., *Thirty-sixth Session, Supplement No. 21* (A/36/21); ibid., *Thirty-seventh Session, Supplement No. 21* (A/37/21 and Corr.1); ibid., *Thirty-eighth Session, Supplement No. 21* (A/38/21 and Corr.1 and 2); ibid., *Thirty-ninth Session, Supplement No. 21* (A/39/21); ibid., *Fortieth Session, Supplement No. 21* (A/40/21); ibid., *Forty-first Session, Supplement No. 21* (A/41/21); ibid., *Forty-second Session, Supplement No. 21* (A/42/21); ibid., *Forty-third Session, Supplement No. 21* (A/43/21); ibid., *Forty-fourth Session, Supplement No. 21* (A/44/21); ibid., *Forty-fifth Session, Supplement No. 21* (A/45/21); ibid., *Forty-sixth Session, Supplement No. 21* (A/46/21); ibid., *Forty-seventh Session, Supplement No. 21* (A/47/21); ibid., *Forty-eighth Session, Supplement No. 21* (A/48/21); ibid., *Forty-ninth Session, Supplement No. 21* (A/49/21) and ibid., *Fiftieth Session, Supplement No. 21* (A/50/21).

[3] Ibid., *Fifty-first Session, Supplement No. 21* (A/51/21).